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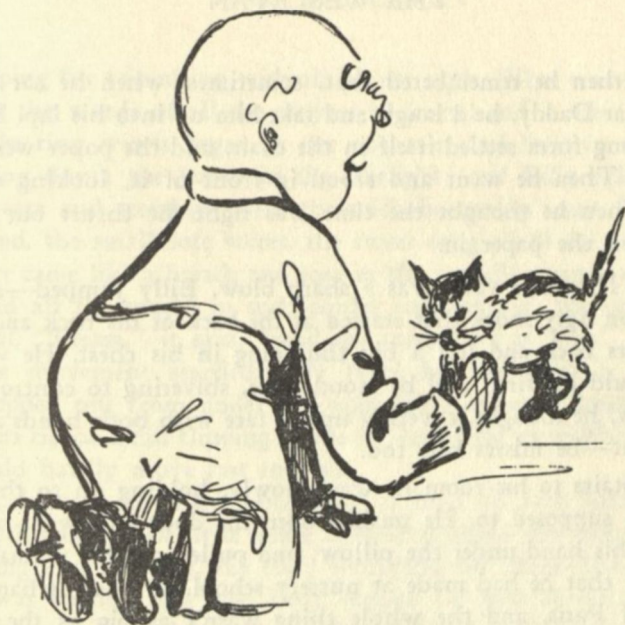
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Better Not Cry

By CHARLOTTE POOLE

It was the Christ-child eve, tender and porcelain blue. Only the little stars blinked out over the trees in the cold blue sky. Only the little ice flakes alighted on the trees and grass, and hung, twinkling, gleaming in the blue dusk. Never had the evening sky hovered so lightly over all the world. Never had winter air embraced so gently each smallest breeze. And never had such a tiny hope quivered so high as in a small boy's heart this night.

Billy Cranston had watched out the window until his eyes felt hollow and big, and he held his lower lip tightly between his teeth. Each time his sigh frosted the glass, he reached out and rubbed it away and looked out once more. The window was cold to the touch of his cheek.

Then he heard the door shut, soundly, and he knew the firm step. Daddy was home.

He turned over onto his stomach and clambered down from his perch on the high stool; then ran down the hall to the living room. Daddy was standing at the mantelpiece, opening Christmas cards, with his paper tucked under his arm. Wasn't Mama coming home? Billy threw back his head and looked up at his dad, smiling real big for a little boy. But Mr. Cranston just stooped down and patted him on the shoulder, and said in a funny tired voice, "Hello, Billy, how's the boy?"

Billy looked after him while he went to hang up his coat and hat, and the smile drifted from his face. He watched him come back to read his

paper, and then he remembered that, sometimes, when he sat behind it and peeked at Daddy, he'd laugh and take him up into his lap. He waited while his long form settled itself in the chair, and the paper went up like a big tent. Then he went and stood in front of it, looking up at the pictures. When he thought the time was right, he thrust out his hand and punched the paper in.

"Billy!" His dad's voice was a sharp blow. Billy jumped—not a real jump, but an ugly shock that started at the back of his neck and snapped his shoulders back and left a big thumping in his chest. He wanted to cry but would die first, and he stood there, shivering to control himself. Poor Daddy, he thought, covering up his face with both hands and holding on tight—he misses her, too.

Up the stairs to his room he went slowly, holding on to the banister like he was supposed to. He pushed open the door and went to his bed and thrust his hand under the pillow, and pulled out his mama's Christmas present that he had made at nursery school. It was his handprint in a plaster of Paris, and the whole thing wasn't as big as the saucer of her coffee cup. He sat down on the bed and held it, and sighed a little small sigh. What would Mama want with his handprint? She was mad at him and Daddy, and she wasn't even coming home for Christmas.

Christmas! He closed his eyes and put both hands over his ears. He could hear little tiny bells jingling somewhere, and faint, soft singing—like the smallest angels singing, far away. *Christmas*—it was a breathless word—he let his eyes open wide and thrilled all over with excitement. Something wonderful was going to happen—even though Mama was not there to tell him so, and though Daddy was too sad to see the little stars—Billy knew it was Christmas Eve.

But, poor Daddy. He shouldn't be sad on Christmas Eve. Billy got up and took his present in his hand and went down the steps again.

The living room chair was empty. Billy walked over to the tree and pushed his present underneath the packages and then went into the kitchen. Daddy was sitting at the table with his head in his arms. Was he asleep? Billy didn't dare wake him. Why did he and Mama have to get mad at each other?

He opened the back door and slipped out, closing it behind him. It was almost dark now; the trees and grass glared white with ice, but no snow. He let himself down the stairs, holding tightly to the banister, and then he stood at the bottom, because there was nowhere to step, and no place to sit down. The cold air closed around his flushed face. It was so still—so quiet. All the sky was a blue-white hollow over the world, and all the trees hovered together; all the tiny stars blinked at one another—only Billy was all alone. Only his tiny heart ached with a feeling it had never known before—he was alone. He was too brave to cry, but there was no one to see that he was brave—or to care. His wide eyes took in so much radiance that he could scarcely breathe, and he stood there in the hushed

cold, groping for something with all his strength. What was it? He could remember the words of all the prayers he knew, and it wasn't in any of them. The tiny winds began to rise and stir, and little ice drops rolled shimmering down the leaves in the starlight; and Billy held his hands over his ears and trembled with the wish he couldn't say. Then in the small wind, the small soft voices, the sweet song of all the smallest stars, the prayer came like a breath and rose in the sparkling vapor of the night. Never had all the world in such tender stillness over the prayer of one small soul. "Please," it said, "send me something to love."

Sudden movement startled Billy from his thoughts—a tiny, white kitten stepped out from under the steps with unsteady tread on the icy ground, its tip of a tail flipping in the air each time its wobbly legs failed. Billy could hardly move fast enough.

"Wait, kitty!" he called, struggling to keep his own balance, "Wait, you'll catch cold." The little white animal wobbled just out of his reach, floundering and slipping, his body whipping out from under him until his fur was stringy and wet. Billy lunged for him at last, and caught him by one small hind leg, as he fell, pulling him into the crook of his arm and rolling over and over on the ground. He scrambled up quickly, trying to hold the squirming bundle while he brushed the icy water off himself. His hands were so cold that he could hardly move his fingers; but finally the kitten allowed itself to be held and carried back to the stairs.

Billy stooped down then and peered into the gloom under the porch. Mama cat was dead, lying stiff in a grimace of age and pain, and Billy looked at her and then back at the kitten, horrified. But the kitten began to shiver and sneeze, curling up tiny pink lips, and his concern went back to him. He tucked him into the bosom of his coat and held him tight, until he felt a noisy purring against his ribs.

Now, he didn't feel the cold at all. The small furry head buried itself warmly against his chest, and Billy's fingers caressed it automatically.

"Better not cry," he murmured, loving the magic words, "Better not pout—better not cry." His hand gave a small reassuring pat, and the kitten opened tiny dark blue eyes and looked right into his face and Billy knew he had a friend forever. He pressed the little head back down against the hollow of his throat, cupping one hand over it, and, holding on with the other to the banister, he went back up the stairs.

Through the window he caught a glimpse of a wonderful sight. He saw his daddy's back and his mother's arms and the tips of her small shoes. Mama! A thrill went through him, and he wanted to squeal for joy. He started to open the door and run inside, but he stopped for a moment and turned around. He listened to the small heart stirring in the wind, and to the tiny ice drops falling. The chill, small breathing of the wind took his words and the little tears that ran down his face and wafted them upward, far away.

"Have a real happy Christmas," he whispered.

A Christmas Story

*Silent is this wondrous night,
Holy is the shining light,
The stars proclaim their power and glory
And tell the world their age old story.*

*How calm the earth is, and serene
As I lay my head down now and dream,
The Lord this night is by my side
There, through the night, He will abide.*

*A holy infant Child was born
In a manger so forlorn,
There on a bed of wheat and hay,
But glorious was that gladsome day.*

*Shepherds came there from afar,
Following a bright and shining star,
To see the Christ Child, an infant Babe,
And gifts of gold to Him they gave.*

*Kings proclaimed His holy name,
Lands, both far and near, the same,
The power of the Lord was known
Before the next new, glorious morn.*

*The angel's voiceless guided all
To this lonely, shepherd's stall,
Singing of this night divine,
Thanking God for this glorious time.*

*Praises they sang to this holy Child
And of His virgin Mother mild,
Jesus Christ is born this night
Surrounded by a heavenly light.*

*Praise the Lord in all His glory,
Never ends this gospel story,
Thanks be to God on this great day,
Jesus Christ will reign away.*

—MARGUERITE GAIL MILLIGAN

A Modern Folk Ballad

*He's a jolly good fellow
The oldest one in the land.
To elders he's a spirit
To kids he's a wonderful man!*

*But to all folks he spells "Pleasure"
Whether large or small amounts
People are good because of him
And that's what really counts!*

*He's sung about from coast to coast
Discussed from Pole to Pole.
He works in private all year round
For one winter day, so it is told!*

*Oh, he's a jolly good fellow
The oldest one in the land.
To elders he's a spirit
To kids he's a wonderful man!*

*SEEING the glimmer
The shimmer of lights
The glow of the candles
As they light the nights*

*The glittering tinsel
On the evergreen tree
The pure white snow
Falling silently*

*The hustle and bustle
Across Main street
Snow ball fights
And hail and sleet.*

*Seeing these things,
St. Nick, aforementioned,
Rushes all orders
So he won't cause dissension!*

*For he's a jolly good fellow
The oldest one in the land
To elders he's a spirit
To kids he's a wonderful man!*

*HEARING the tinkle
The jingle of bells
The bonging of chimes
And children's yells*

*The crackle of logs
In open fires
The Christmas story
And hymns of choirs*

*"It's here!" he calls,
Laughing once more
"A Merry Christmas
For '54"*

*Oh he's a jolly good fellow
The oldest one in the land
To elders he's a spirit
To kids he's a wonderful man!*

—LUCY NEELEY

Brain Strain

*I sit tonight
Beneath man
Edison's electric light.
And try to think of phrases bright
To make a theme;
But I can't write.*

*I think the thoughts
That students think,
And in deep
Concentration I soon sink.
I glance at the clock,
I yawn, then blink.
Oh, my body and soul,
Why can't this girl think?*

—LILA HOLLIDAY

There Shall Be A Christmas

MARTHA CARTER

The snow no longer fell. It had spread its white, velvet blanket over the earth and settled down to sleep. The world outside the big, old Victorian house on Ferry Street was immobile with only a few footprints in the snow to testify that anyone had passed by since the last flurry of snow. The pale moonlight disclosed long, black shadows cast upon the snow by a lacy network of bare trees. It was Christmas Eve, and all was silent.

Inside the quiet, old house two young children sat by an open fireplace, gazing into the dancing flames. The little boy's grave face displayed no emotion as he counted the wolves that crept along the wall behind the massive, red velvet sofa. His little sister, Eleanor, walked to the window and pressed her nose against the cold pane. She grew tired of watching the white road and waiting. "Paul, why doesn't he come?" she asked in her most grown-up voice.

"Any minute now, Ellie, I 'spec' most any minute now," although Paul knew he wouldn't come at all.

"Does Grandma know it's Christmas?"

He was disgusted. "Sure, everyone knows when Christmas is."

"Will it be like Christmas was at home, Paul?" Her eyes said silent prayers. "Santa Claus will know where to find us, won't he?"

Paul did not have the heart to tell Ellie that there was no Santa Claus, and that most likely Christmas in Grandma's house could not possibly bear any resemblance to the Christmases he had remembered at home with the giant trees that Papa always brought in. He could still hear his mother making her annual speech, "Now, George, you know better than to track snow all over my clean floor." And Papa would laugh and say that it wasn't snow at all but angel's dust. The house had smelled like hot cinnamon cookies and fresh, green pine boughs. As he stared into the fire he could almost see the massive tree all decorated with shining tinsel and a Christmas angel sitting smack on the top. He imagined that the golden angel was kind of sad about being all wrapped up in tissue paper in that old box during the Christmas holidays. Paul wondered where the Christmas angel was now that Mama and Papa had gone away and given him and Ellie to Grandma.

A tall woman with greying black hair entered the room, and briskly began to insist that it was too late for two children to be up and about.

"But Grandma, he ain't come yet, and besides, it's Christmas Eve," Ellie begged.

"I know, Kitten, and don't say ain't. It's not lady-like. Now to bed with you both!"

"But Grandma . . ."

"Hurry now!"

Two pathetic little figures hurried up two flights of stairs and crawled between the covers of a strange bed, in a strange room, in a strange house. Indeed, it had been a strange Christmas Eve.

Eleanor Sanford brushed a stray wisp of hair out of her eyes. She began to feel that probably she had been a little hard on the two little children that had been thrust on her after the death of her daughter. She had always suspected that no good would come out of her little girl's marriage to that George. And now he was even an alcoholic. It had been such a long, long, long time since the old house had resounded with the laughter of and when her own little girl had sat up in the living-room waiting for Santa. How had she done it then? What had Christmas been like when that other little girl with the tousled, black curls had munched hot cinnamon cookies in the old kitchen? Suddenly she felt very old as she put on her warmest coat and hurried out into the snow.

The crowds had narrowed down to a few straggling, last-minute shoppers. They carried their big bundles under theirs so that they could tuck their cold hands inside the warmth of their overcoat pockets. They came in little groups carrying a variety of things such as pink toy cribs, tiny red tricycles, and long oblong boxes that could not conceivably hold anything but dolls. There were the short and tall people, the fat and smiling ones, the thin and solemn ones, but they all had the same glowing red noses, and they were all in a hurry to get to the warmth of home.

A lonely looking Santa stood on the corner by the big department store. The little bell that he rang constantly sounded forlorn as the laughing people passed, without even glancing at the red lettered sign that said "Give." The worn, red Santa suit hung off his lean frame and the pillow stuffed in front gave him a comical rather than jolly appearance. He was weary and his arm ached from waving the bell since early morning, but the nondescript Santa no longer heard the bell. All he could hear was, "George, you know better than to track snow all over my clean floor," and then he heard the laughter of little Ellie and Paul. If anyone had taken the trouble to notice they might have seen two big tears tumble down Santa's cheeks. But they didn't. In fact, not a single person thought it the least bit odd that the Santa hurried away, leaving the gaping, red chimney with the Give sign on the side.

Years later, Paul reflected on that first Christmas at Grandma's. He had been so sure that there would be no Santa, no tinsel tree with a shining Christmas angel on the top, no cinnamon cookies like Mama's. But there

had been. As he walked reluctantly down the stairs that Christmas morning the first thing that he had seen was a long trail of melting snow extending from the stained oak door to the big parlor. Grandma was busy decorating the biggest tree that he had ever seen, and it seemed to the wide-eyed little boy that there was no end of big dolls, little red bicycles, and pink cribs. Best of all, there was Papa. Where had Grandma found Papa? And where had Papa found their old Christmas angel? Ellie was sitting on Papa's knee and saying over and over, "You did come, Papa, and so did Santa."

There were many things that Paul never understood about that shining day, such as how Grandma's heart had melted at the sight of a forlorn Santa Claus gazing in a toy store window at little red bicycles and pink cribs. Yet he knew in his heart that as long as little girls like Ellie have hope in their hearts and believe in Santa Claus, there shall be a Christmas.

A Real Christmas

*Give me not, this Christmastide,
Gifts of worldly worth;
Fill me only with the truth
Of that Unacclaimed Birth.*

*Ring not bells of brassy clang,
I'll hear no peals of mirth.
Let me only hear these ring:
"Peace to men on earth."*

*Sing not songs of gay reindeer,
Tinsel, glitter and gold;
Hush, let all the world now hear
The song of angels of old.*

*Hang not your houses with brightness
Of merely an earthly glow,
Think further, deeper now—
The season's true brilliance you'll know.*

*Clear your hearts of anxiety,
Forget your hurry and rush;
Calm your fears and sit down for a while;
Obtain strength from a heavenly hush.*

—JERE HOUSE

Without You

*You've left me.
 Forgetting you will be hard.
 Hard as forgetting an open fire
 On a winter's night, or
 Forgetting summer showers.
 As hard as looking into a
 Child's eyes when you've had to tell him "no".*

*You're gone.
 I'll see the places we've been together,
 And though you are not there
 I'll see you—your brown hair shining,
 Your blue eyes atwinkle in a smile.
 Your presence is all around me;
 Everywhere memories of you
 Grate against my heart.*

*You're with me no more.
 Why are there no seasons?
 Everything is the dripping gray of winter.
 All is cold, month after month.
 Miserable creatures huddle in the
 Winter of having you no more.
 And the rains pound, and the winds blow.*

*Without you—
 Though I grope in life for you
 As a man gropes in darkness for a chair,
 You are never to be found again
 And my heart is destined forever
 To beat as if to burst.
 I must live without you—
 The spark of my life.*

—TRUDY WILSON

Off-Guard

*Strong winds
 Burst from heaven;
 Forces like shoving hands—
 Enter the soul, gusts catching you
 Off-guard.*

—BEE SECKINGER

A Sterling Silver Jingle

I

*"Full knee lies the winter snow"
And o'er the door hangs mistletoe.
All decked out with boughs of holly,
We put aside drab melancholy;
For now our thoughts should all be jolly.*

II

*"Chestnuts roasting on an open fire"
Sing season's greetings to the carol choir.
The muted snow seems poised in flight.
Wholly silent is the night;
But this year's Christmas will be white.*

III

*"The merry, merry bells of Yule"
Ring out a message crazy cool:
Pardon, sir, could you spare a dime?
For in the city 'tis Christmas time,
And this is the end of our nonsense rhyme.*

—DEL COVEY AND THOM MARTIN

Fascination

*The child, seeing the breezes teasing the grasses along the horizon,
Waddled to reach his newly discovered toy.*

Unsatisfied he cried.

Hearing unfamiliar noises, he looked wide-eyed upon the glittering expanse.

Moving along the sand he stumbled, but was cuddled by the warm protector.

He giggled as the enfolding arms tickled, causing him to move on.

His enchanted eyes looked upon white glimmering bubbles . . .

Bubbles . . . bubbles . . . ever moving, racing up,

Drawing back, twisting, turning, racing up, drawing back . . .

It was a game—to catch, to hold and to keep.

He caught some racing bubbles, but they soon vanished . . .

Bigger ones lured him out a little farther . . . a little farther . . .

It was a game—to catch, to hold, and to keep.

BEE SECKINGER

Tales of the Porter Pilgrims

Anonymous

*When every pupil his own place hath taken,
And with his clamoring the rafters shaken,
And chairs have tumbled, water glasses tingled,
And songs of glee and sorrow sweetly mingled;
When feet with standing long find need to shuffle,
And hunger gayest chatter seeks to muffle;
Amid the revelry and pleasant bustle
With rapid stride, the stragglers now do hustle.
The room is still, inclined is each head.
Then with a stately and most pompous tread
(Now that they file for all the school to see,)
Make entrance then the honored faculty.
And with slow step in file by rank and age,
From door to table make their pilgrimage.*

*A DEAN there was, a noble woman she,
Who rightly strode with grace for all to see.
Her gaze did stray to neither left nor right,
And her quick smile—though insincere—was bright.
Announcements did she make at lunch and tea,
Intoning through her nose quite prettily.
And all before her train did step aside,
And she as table hostess did abide.*

*Following with measured pace and slow
That all might see her place, walked the MAESTRO.
She spoke good French and accents did employ
To prove it thus. But serving her was joy.
She'd talk and jest and eat right heartily;
Her manner shocked the DEAN quite readily.
Yet by rank at the hostess' left she stayed,
For on the violin with great skill she played.*

*Next, all in white, and capped, the NURSES came,
Who, knowing every student there by name,
Did smile within at such formality,
And horrify the honored faculty
By greeting from the solemn, regal train
Each pupil and by calling forth her name.
And close behind, seeking the DEAN to please,
The MATRON walked, bearing her ring of keys.*

The HAUSFRAU next, with quiet timid pace.
 Her hair in waves, a sweet and kindly face
 Betraying her to all as but a mother
 To girls away from home. Nor such another
 In all the train. Then came MADAM CURIE
 Who tutored in the field of chemistry.
 And quietly ate and hardly spoke a word,
 Else simply for the noise she was unheard.*

*And trouncing at the tail quite jauntily,
 (JACK OF ALL TRADES as she did seem to be)
 There came the gayest pilgrim of them all.
 Her eyes did flash; she was of stature small.
 No task too large her capability
 Defeated or escaped. Yet faculty
 She was in name, but not in piety,
 And with the waitress joked quite willingly.*

*Now in a few words I have rehearsed for you
 Number, array, and rank, and told you too
 How they did come to make a company.
 Suppose we leave them now to grace and tea.*

*HAUSFRAU: the housemother.

Deep Happiness

*All together . . . red brick . . . friends . . . studying . . . playing . . . happiness.
 Far apart . . . trains . . . busses . . . planes. Home . . . family . . . happiness
 Carols . . . gifts . . . lights . . . parties . . . football . . . happiness.
 All together . . . red brick . . . friends . . . studying . . . playing . . . deep
 happiness.*

—OLIVIA EVANS



The Red Leaf

By ANN GODWIN

Kris leaned against the heavy glass door and pushed her way through the gaily bedecked throng that hovered like so many painted butterflies about the sign-out desk. The air was stale with the smell of cigarettes and wet clothes hung to dry in the narrow passage. Stumbling against a trunk, she looked hastily about, her cheeks blazing and her eyes filled with tears. No one had noticed that she limped. No one had seen Kris with her armload of books and papers.

"No, she doesn't live on this floor," a girl in a lacy slip was shouting above the din into the telephone. "Won't I do? Now, let's not get technical." She laughed a silvery laugh and hung up the receiver. "Imagine that," she commented. "Kris, with a 'K' no less."

Lowering her head slightly, Kris made her way to the end of the hall and the haven of her room. Ellen was there; she could see the narrow beam of light filtering through the chipped paint on the transom. She thought of her roommate. Ellen, delicate and lovely, brushing her honey-colored ponytail or pounding away on her ancient Remington. Ellen, who accepted life with a philosophical calmness and had a smile for everyone.

Light flooded the doorway as she entered her room. Ellen stood before the washbasin, a mountain of suds hiding her childlike hands.

"Hi," she said. "How about one chorus of the Irish Washerwoman

in view of my domestic endeavors?" Kris smiled faintly and dropped her books on the bed.

"I always say there's nothing quite as good for the soul as washing. And, of course, the real payoff comes when I have clean sox for tomorrow. I almost believe old Carrigan knew I had on yesterday's sox in class today. His eyes are so black and he always seems to be—Kris, what's the matter?"

Ellen's voice became soft. She slid her arm gently around the thin shoulders. "Is it the knee again?" Kris shook her head, not trusting herself to speak.

The room was silent; only the sound of water could be heard as Ellen made puffy balls of the snowy foam.

"I don't know what's the matter," Kris answered finally. Her voice was pleading and very unlike the sophisticated girl who found life too, too boring of late. "I—I don't know what I'm afraid of," she stammered. "But I am afraid."

Kris lay awake for long time, the unknown fear plaguing her rest like an aching tooth. She tried to concentrate on history for tomorrow or a dress for the Christmas banquet, but always her mind slipped back along the same, familiar path. What was she going to do? What did you do when your whole world dropped out from under you?

Life had been so simple. Few girls know exactly where they are going at eighteen; some never find what they are looking for. Kris had been certain. Two years in the little liberal arts college to please her parents, and then touring with a small ballet company: this was her dream. The manager of the show had been very impressed and had left the standing offer after her senior recital. "A born dancer," her teacher had proclaimed.

This was the beginning. A start with a small company, then study in France, and then who could tell? How Kris loved the excitement of opening night, the flowers over the footlights and the smell of greasepaint. But she was an artist. The glamour and beauty of the stage, yes, but she loved also the endless hours of practice.

Kris had accepted the two years of scholastic studies, but only because she could continue her dancing in a small studio just off campus. Now all that had given her life meaning had disappeared. A sob caught in her throat, and she clasped her hands over her ears, shutting out the screams—her screams. In the dark Kris imagined herself lying once again at the foot of the balcony, like a dancing puppet with no one holding the wires.

Her palms dug into her temples; then she relaxed. She could not remember the pain. The curious crumpled heap, her left leg dangling useless, but not the pain. Soon Kris fell into a troubled sleep.

The next afternoon was gray and cold. A raw wind swept a flurry of dry leaves across her feet as Kris hurried up the steps and into the lecture hall. Another hour with old Carrigan. She had to smile as she took her seat. He did have piercing eyes, and thinking of Ellen's "day-old" sox, she laughed for the first time in days.

The course was at its best a very dry class with much expounding on the part of Dr. Carrigan and very little class discussion. Kris settled her thoughts on a gay, red leaf on the gum tree beside the window, the one sign of life in the bleak November morning. "Hang on, little leaf," she mused cynically. "But I'm putting my money on the wind."

"Hello," said an unfamiliar voice. "And what do you find so intriguing about the landscape that you miss Carrigan's swansong and the mad charge to the snack shop?"

Kris came back to the classroom with a jolt. She looked up into a pair of the bluest eyes she had ever seen, and her smile broadened.

"Oh," she set forth dramatically, "I was watching the little red leaf just outside the window. The wind is so strong and the tree shakes and quivers so."

He followed her gaze to the splash of red against the window pane. "Pretty valiant little fellow," he commented with surprising interest. "He'll come through in fine shape."

"I'm betting on the wind," Kris said coldly.

Some of the warmth went out of his eyes, and blushing slightly, Kris began to stack her books.

"I thought perhaps you'd consider a cup of coffee. It's really quite good at the snack shop—that is, if you've never tasted good coffee. Why with lots of cream and sugar, it passes for coffee."

"Why," she answered, smiling coyly, "I don't even know your name."

"James Bradston. Jamie to most. And you're Kristina Lawson—Kris to people who can hold your attention long enough to speak to you."

"But how did you—"

"Oh, I know a great deal about you, Kris," he said teasingly.

"Like what?" she asked, wondering if he could possibly know.

"Well, that you're bored with our friend Carrigan, and that you're a real softy for leaves, especially red ones. How about coffee?"

"Why, I'd—all right," Kris answered.

"This is nice," she commented once they were settled in the little booth.

"Coffee's always the thing for a rainy day," Jamie ventured. "When you think of all the decisions made and discussions over a simple cup of coffee, it's amazing. Why a cup of coffee is in America what the hearth is to most Europeans. Why, if that little coffee bean had realized that someday he'd wind up in your cup—"

"He'd have been the most miserable one on the bush," Kris finished emphatically. "Excuse me, Jamie, but I really must go."

"But Kris, we just arrived. I thought—could I walk you somewhere?"

"No thank you," she said politely. "I'm perfectly able to walk—that is—to find my way by myself."

The wind seemed colder and Kris drew her coat close about her shoulders. Coffee beans, indeed! And the next thing she knew it would be . . . but be the best little bean that you can." She looked for the leaf, but it was lost to view. "Maybe he gave up," she mused.

Inside it was warm, and the last rays of the pale winter sun bathed the room in light. She pulled off her coat and flung herself across the bed. It had been a long day.

"Kris." Ellen's voice sounded far away. "Kris, you've a phone call. And he sounds awfully handsome."

"And just what is a handsome sound?" she inquired, sitting up and blinking in the light from the hallway. "How long have I been asleep?"

"It's almost suppertime," Ellen answered. "And I don't know why, but he does sound handsome."

Yawning broadly, Kris stood up and walked down the hall to the phone.

"Hello," said the voice at the other end of the wire. "Do you always leave your coffee untouched, or only on days when you're particularly concerned about a jolly red leaf?" She knew it was Jamie.

"Well, I—"

"No explanation necessary. Though you realize, of course, you really owe me an apology? Just happens that I have tickets for the concert Friday. I was wondering if I put on my good behavior and promised not to philosophize for the entire evening, if could interest you in going?"

"Really, I do need to study, and besides—"

"Well, of course, you'd have to promise the whole evening. No leaving in the middle. You did say yes?"

That had been the beginning. Jamie loved music; he saw things in music. Jamie understood the picture that it wove; the stories and feelings that had lived for her in the ballet. Music wove its quiet spell about them.

They attended each weekly concert and spent long hours in the music room, listening to records by the great composers. Jamie would sit on the small divan and Kris would curl up beside him, or sit on the floor at his feet. Once in the beauty of Beethoven, Jamie turned to her: "You'd never know that he was deaf when he composed this."

Suddenly, the old fear was there. Beethoven, whose music had been his very life, had lost his most priceless possession. He'd given his all to music—and then never to hear it. To live in silence. How could he bear the thoughts he must have had? Jamie's hand covered hers, and slowly she relaxed and smiled. His blue eyes met hers, as the music faded away.

The metallic click of the phonograph brought her back to earth, and she glanced at her watch.

"Jamie," she exclaimed, "it's nearly five and you still haven't told me where we're going tonight."

"Don't intend to," he answered. "Only that it's very special, and you must look very lovely."

"Gray-dress special?" she ventured.

Jamie considered the query. "Yes, definitely gray-dress special. I'll be by about eight."

The evening was cool, and even the stars seemed to twinkle gaily. Kris watched Jamie as he skillfully guided the car along the crowded boulevard.

This was his night. There was the look of a little boy about him, the "look, Ma, no hands" expression. She leaned back against the seat. It was good to be with Jamie.

Along the crowded walk his step was gay, and they laughed loudly at nothing in particular. Suddenly, Jamie stopped and producing two pale green tickets from his pocket, exclaimed: "Madame, the ballet!"

Kris stood motionless, the picture spinning before her eyes. An icy hand clutched her heart. Then trying to smile, she took Jamie's arm and stepped carefully into the auditorium.

When they were seated, she leaned back and closed her eyes. Everything was the same. The orchestra tuning, the excited voices of the impatient audience, and then the first soft strands of the prelude.

Kris clasped her hands and tried to concentrate. The story unfolded, but its lovely groups and solos were overpowered by a solitary figure. A girl in a fluffy white dress, always she was there dancing, but there was a balcony too and the screams, and always the threat of half-remembered pain. She dug her palms into her temples. In an instant she was on her feet and down the stairway. A sharp pain shot through her, but she ignored the iron rail and darted past the usher and out the open door.

In a moment, Jamie was at her side, white, but reassuring. He led her gently across the street to a bench and sat down beside her.

"Oh, Jamie," she cried. "I should have been dancing tonight. I-I can't bear to see them so graceful, so happy. I can't stand to see them having what I can't." Kris buried her face in her hands, but her eyes were dry.

Jamie slid his arm around her shoulders. "Darling, you can't always have life as gay and glamorous as you'd like it to be."

"But you don't understand. You can't know what it's like to have your dreams shattered. One faulty railing, one careless step, and my whole life gone. You can't understand what it's like to go through life crippled, and to have people staring at you and despising you for it. To have the people you once called friends forget that you exist."

"Kris," said Jamie softly, "you are not crippled, and even if you were, it's no reason for people to hate or despise you. Your world is cold and lonely because you make it so. There are other things besides dancing. Sure it's hard to take, but maybe it's a part of a larger plan. And you don't have to find it alone."

"Maybe I'd just as soon make my own plan," she snapped. "Maybe I'd just as soon you stayed out of my life. It's my life and I'll live it the way I want to. Maybe I want to be lonely—only I'm not. I'm happy. Very happy."

"Kris—"

"Oh, why don't you go away and leave me alone?"

Jamie stood quietly, and then turned and disappeared from view among the trees. Kris sat motionless, not daring to move. The old fear was there, and the dark closed around her.

"Jamie," she called. "Jamie, please wait." Rising, she started along the

path. The air was alive with nameless terror, and she ran into the shadows. "Jamie, please wait."

And then Jamie was there, his arms around her. She began to cry, silently at first and then with the tears of half a life-time. All of the old grief, the burden of fear melted away, leaving her tired and worn. She stood before him, shaking and looking very much like a little girl. The wind tugged at her skirt and Jamie pulled her coat closer around her shoulders.

"I see a red leaf," he said.

"Silly," Kris answered, "it's almost spring."

"Wind's blowing pretty hard," Jamie continued. "Doubt if he'll make it."

"I'm betting on the leaf," Kris answered.

"Christmas"

*Brightly colored is the tree,
Children running around in glee.
Happy, gay in all their joy
As they play with every toy.*

*Santa Claus had come before
But every time he brings much more
To scatter around, in stockings too
Lollipops, red, green, and blue.*

*Teddy bears of brown and black
Nothing in toys these children lack,
Lighted candles filled the rooms
Nowhere on each was there any gloom.*

*Happiness filled the souls and hearts
Families together, never apart,
Carols rang through the glorious night
The stars shone on high with a wondrous light.*

*Tucked in bed to sleep 'til morn
Not a soul was found forlorn,
The world slept still while Santa came
Keeping in their hearts his joyful name.*

